

Testimony of Suzanne M. Miller
in Support of HB6759 An Act Concerning Early Childhood

Senator McCrory, Representative Curry, Ranking members Berthel and McCarty and members of the Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on HB6759 An Act Concerning Early Childhood.

My name is Suzanne Miller. My daughter and I have been Owners/Directors of early learning centers in Connecticut since 2005. We were forced to permanently close our Cheshire Nursery School in Cheshire during Covid, but we continue to operate childcare programs in Hamden and Clinton.

I want to thank you for recognizing in section 1 of this bill that compensation for early educators is perhaps the single largest issue facing the early care and education sector today. The rapid increase in entry level wages throughout the economy has left early care programs struggling to retain and attract staff.

The early education field is extremely demanding and we have been steadily losing our educated, experienced staff to other sector employment with more flexibility, better benefits, and higher wages. Attracting and retaining ANY staff, let alone high caliber teachers is increasingly difficult, and it is clear the educational trends are moving away from ECE as a higher education major, indicating this is not a short-term problem.

What is missing from this bill is the way in which this will be paid for. I urge you to support increased funding for the state funded early care programs and the creation of a wage equity fund similar to what was created in Washington DC to increase wages for early educators without adding to the child care cost burden that families already face.

Most childcare programs are caught in a downward spiral, where wage demands are causing unsustainable increases in tuition, while at the same time the quality of care decreases due to the unskilled labor pool. Additionally less and less children are able to receive early care and education, as we are forced to close classrooms due to staff turnover and shortages.

While increasing the pay scale would go a long way to resolving this downward spiral occurring in the early education sector in Connecticut, it will create the opposite effect if those wage increases are not permanently supported by government dollars.

We applied the pay scale in the proposed Workforce Compensation Schedule to just one of our childcare programs (Hamden) to determine the effect on operations. We discovered the following:

- We would face an increase of \$40.32/hr (not including longevity pay rates). Based on our 55 hour week, the increased cost for salary only would be \$2,218/wk. Figuring a 1.25% overall employer cost for salaries, the weekly increase rises to \$2,772/week.
- Due to the rapid wage inflation we are already experiencing, combined with the inability to operate at full capacity, we are already failing to break-even with parent tuition as our only source of income. The above-described Hamden Center would incur an annual burden of \$144,444 in additional wage costs.
- We would have three options to address this scenario:
 1. Permanently close.
 2. Increase weekly tuition for each part-week and full-week student by \$70/wk (if operating at full capacity), or by \$80/wk at our current limited capacity. This would be unsustainable for working families, and would result in further attrition and lower capacity necessitating even higher tuition.
 3. Lay off all educated staff members, and offer care using only high-school-educated minimum wage workers. This would degrade the quality of early care and education to a meaningless babysitting service, doing a serious and unforgivable disservice to children and families in Connecticut.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.